

Chiang Mai I found the descriptions very interesting. Indeed, there are ribbon-like shopping areas along highways and out of villages in many northern Thailand locations. This clustering of like vendors and similar selections of goods is intriguing.

Materializing Thailand is quite different from the above. It is about the big picture, representation or palimpsest (pp. 41-43) of Thailand (or "Amazing Thailand"). The author, Van Esterik, has been deeply influenced by her lengthy Thai involvement and her recurring analyses of this Thai experience. It is a fine book, but sometimes hard to come to grips with.

This comment is not a criticism of the author or her writing/organizing abilities. Rather it relates to her subject, Thailand. Thailand and its people are different and a subject which likely escapes the anthropological discipline's conventional tools, in part because Thailand has taken pains to become a popular tourist destination and by doing so has hidden many aspects of Thai life.

In her chapter, "Representing Thai Culture" she talks about "... the new temples of prosperity, shopping malls," and contrasts them with the "... unpredictable and undignified bargaining in hot, dark, noisy markets for locally made goods" (p. 123). Both malls and markets have quantities of goods which cannot be "authenticated," but tourists happily "buy into" the business of instant antiques and fake Rolex watches. These commercial ventures are right next to "The Grand Palace" or restored ruins of historic palaces at Sukhothai or Ayutthaya. These and, "the Grand Mall" through which one exits Bangkok International Airport and Thailand are difficult to categorize. The analysis of this prominent aspect of Thai culture surely requires a new set of anthropological tools.

Van Esterik's work is rewarding to the diligent reader. Her attempt to look at Thai culture and Thai studies from a more feminist perspective is successful in bringing out interesting insights into Buddhism, into the AIDS epidemic, and "kalatesa."

Thais believe that "kalatesa," the wedding of context and activity with manners and speech, makes for a better life for all. And, it excuses the excesses of foreigners—both tourists and anthropologists (pp. 38, 39, 40). One also suspects that this is one reason that Thai culture and behaviour and its description are hard to come to grips with. It makes everyday Thai Buddhism hard to grasp, and it makes it hard to understand Thai prostitution, globalization, and the AIDS/HIV problem. "Kalatesa" plays a major part in hiding issues of poverty, class, and women by making them inappropriate to discuss in most contexts. "Materializing Thailand" gives you the chance to think about all this, however.

James Carrier (ed.), *Meanings of the Market: The Free Market in Western Culture*, Oxford and New York: Berg, 1997, xvii + 276 pages

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On July 4th of this year, Adbusters magazine unveiled a new American flag. In place of the familiar white stars were corporate logos such as those of Nike, McDonald's, Shell, IBM and Coca-Cola. The intention, of course, was to highlight the power that big corporations now have over the political process, but its resonance attested to something closer to home: increasingly, the very meaning of "America"—what it stands for in the popular imagination—is being truncated and reduced to little more than that of "economy." Alternately put, the economy is increasingly the discourse through which Americans define their culture and themselves. Whether this is understood as a flattening and narrowing of social life to fit the dictates of instrumental rationality, or a re-definition of social life in terms of the language of the market, it essentially amounts to the same thing: the idea of the "free market" is now a central organizing principle in American culture.

Meanings of the Market is a collection of essays that explore the complex and often contradictory meanings of the market in Western culture. The reified free market model is pulled out of the skies and down to a level of empirical analysis, to reveal its historical, cultural, and ideological underpinnings. It is an impressive collection of six original essays and a wonderful introduction by James Carrier which weaves the chapters into a coherent theoretical whole. Carrier persuades us to see the free market model as a type of discourse through which we talk about ourselves and others; a lingua franca that imposes a particular type of order and meaning of experience, and through which we understand ourselves. Central to the model is the idea that the world is comprised of detached individuals, free of cultural and social constraints, rationally calculating the costs and benefits of their economic transactions. Carrier reveals this model to be more artifact than fact—one that concerns our idealized selves, and our beliefs about the way things "should" work, far more than it reflects the actual workings of the economy.

So, in spite of the Asian financial crisis, Russia's faltering economy, the dot.com disasters and growing absolute poverty for the vast majority of humankind, we continue to be told by the high priests of capitalism that "the fundamentals of the world economy are sound." To the faithful, the free market model is impervious to criticism: successes are all its own, failures are attributed to deviations from the model, and alternative non-market successes are "anomalies." The model has all the makings of a cultural myth: its meanings are multiple, condensed, and its boundaries are hard to delimit. Within its scope are such strongly held cultural values as anti-authoritarianism, equality, self-reliance, individual responsibility, freedom from constraint, and private property—it is a deep well whose riches can never be used up.

Carrier is careful not to underestimate the power of myth, and is critical of efforts in anthropology that separate culture from society. Treating the market solely as an idealized representation, removed from any connection to reality, would be to ignore its immense and frequently injurious impact on the lives of ordinary people, and on the natural environment. The increasing privatization of social services in the name of "efficiency," the accelerating monetization of social life through "cost-benefit analysis," and the reorganization of local economies to meet global demands in the name of ever "freer trade," are all examples of how free market ideology is anything but illusory.

The book's focus is on the market model as it is understood in America, where it has indubitably the strongest ties to cultural identity and the most forceful rhetorical appeal. The idea of the "free market" has been associated with such deeply held ideals as liberty, equality and the "innate rights of man" since the birth of American political democracy. These ideals, however, have increasingly been de-politicized and appropriated by the language of the market, reduced to the consumer's "right" to choose.

Meanings of the Market serves as an important corrective to anthropology's neglect of Western economies in favour of precapitalist or non-market systems. By bracketing out the capitalist West from its social analysis, mainstream anthropology has implicitly accepted free market rhetoric which claims that it alone is "free" of social context. William Roseberry, in a brief but noteworthy Afterword, praises the collection for rejecting this "historical divide between a socially and culturally embedded non-market economy and a non-social, transaction-based market economy" (p. 259). He situates it within that same tradition of Western cultural critique as that of Marx, Weber and Polanyi.

Indeed, revealing the social and cultural embedded-ness of the market model is especially pertinent in this climate of free market triumphalism. Since the demise of Communism, there has been a rather abrupt shift away from the language of "capitalism" to that of the "free market," giving us the sense that we have moved from the ideological (capitalism vs. communism) to the merely descriptive (a non-ideological depiction of empirical reality).

Joel Kahn's essay provides a much needed historical context to the emergence of the modern ideology of the free market. He denounces—as an affront to genuine cultural difference—the classical anthropological project which makes the non-Western Other the voice of Western cultural criticism. He instead focusses on voices of dissent indigenous to Western culture, and traces the expressivist or romantic intellectual movement that emerged alongside modernity itself. He argues that this critical anti-market discourse is an important subtext to the dominant ideology and, along with it, informs our contemporary understanding of the market.

Susan Love Brown introduces us to the anarcho-capitalist variant of the free market model. It emerged as part of the radical anti-authoritarianism of the 1960s, but has its roots in classical liberal thought of the nineteenth century. Brown

argues that, just like the anti-market discourse from which it distances itself, it emerged from the Puritan anti-authoritarian ethos and ideology of individualism. Through its candid claims to minimizing coercion and maximizing individual liberty, we gain an understanding of the moral appeal of voluntarism that runs through all free market discourse. We also observe its inherent contradictions: anarcho-capitalism's unwillingness to grant that the establishment of individual rights depends on collective action, or that law is necessary for the existence of markets and society, makes its claims spurious and fanciful. As Brown put it, "without mutual consent, not even anarchy is possible" (p. 116).

James Carrier examines alternate visions of the free market through his description of the American media personage Paul Hawken, who has become fabulously successful by consciously subverting the classical economic principle of instrumental rationality, and emphasizing "non-economic" factors. The question over the degree to which financial success can be linked with the Smithian Free Market Model is also raised in Alan Smart's chapter. He describes how the "economic miracles" of East Asia have been based on very different, even contradictory versions of the market, leading to the conclusion that the free market model may only be "a parochial Western version of the utilization of market integration, and that other alternative market models may exist and may be more effective in certain circumstances" (p. 167). Carol MacLennan's chapter on cost-benefit analysis makes good on Carrier's assertion that the free market model is not "merely" cultural artifact; it has profound political and social ramifications. She describes how the language and philosophy of market rationality and efficiency has entered into the democratic process and transformed it. Cost-benefit analyses are becoming increasingly prevalent market tools in the service of the corporate world, limiting government involvement in public health and environmental protection. Buckley and Chapman introduce us to the world of transaction cost theorists whose job it is to determine whether the inputs necessary for one's business should be purchased (on the market) or should be subsumed within one's business (by becoming a "firm"). Transaction cost theorizing assumes that a clear conceptual distinction can be made between the market (conceived of as selfish optimism) and the firm (the domain of cooperation, loyalty and trust). But Buckley and Chapman demonstrate that these dichotomies are idealized typologies with little connection to empirical reality. Overlap in orientations between the market and firm is far more common than clear cut distinctions, with the effect that transaction cost analyzing ends up being based more on subjective feelings than on objective criterion.

Meanings of the Market firmly establishes the free market model as an ideological construct central to an understanding of Western culture. It is an excellent and timely contribution to the anthropological study of engender further ethnographic work in this neglected field.